International Students' Integration in Classroom: Strategies and Support by Teachers and Local Students in Higher Education

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Abstract

European Higher Education institutions often have students from different countries and cultures. This situation, in part encouraged by the Erasmus program, has provided universities with an international character. Institutions have the opportunity to improve by strengthening cultural ties and making cultural diversity a true reality in universities. The present study focuses on examining teachers' and local students' support of integrating international students into classrooms, and the way local students build relationships with those students. Using a qualitative approach, two sets of interviews were conducted with Erasmus students and teachers from a Spanish university. In general, results indicate that teachers' support depends on their own ideologies about integration, and it plays a relevant role in understanding Erasmus students' emotional, academic and social adaptation in the classroom. In addition, results reveal that local students' intention to start relationships with exchange students depends mainly on their personal characteristics. In conclusion, communication difficulties and a lack of support in the classroom can lead to a decrease in international students' satisfaction, decreased contact with local students and maladjustment in the host culture.

Keywords: International students, support, teachers, classroom, relationships, adaptation

Integration of International Students in the Classroom: Strategies and Support by Teachers and Local Students in Higher Education

The Erasmus program and its diverse exchange modalities have increased the mobility of students in European Higher Education (De-Juan-Vigaray, Parra, & Beltrán, 2014; García, 2013; Pineda, Moreno, & Belvis, 2008; Rodríguez, Bustillo, & Mariel, 2011). As the data show, the number of Erasmus students has increased from 3,244 in 1987-1988 to 272,497 in 2013-2014, with a higher percentage of women (60.2%) in 2013-2014. Spain is the destination most widely chosen by European students, with 39,277 students received in 2013-2014 (European Commission, 2015). Currently, a high level of mobility (incoming and outgoing) is a sign of prestige and quality for many Higher Education institutions, and internationalization is a fundamental indicator in the ranking of worldwide universities (Kehm, 2005; Souto-Otero, Huisman, Beerkens, de Wit, & Vujié, 2013). The increase in the number of international students in Higher Education has led to a growing interest in these programs (Li, Chen, & Duanmu, 2010), especially related to perceived support, intercultural relations, barriers in communication, and the adaptation process of these students in the host country (Kudo & Simkin, 2003).

The interaction between international and local students enriches interpersonal relationships between them and with teachers (Luo, 2016; Volet & Ang, 2012). This unique intercultural space in the classroom develops diverse perspectives of knowledge, intercultural relations, and communication (Aguaded & Pozo, 2009; Cho & Yu, 2015). In spite of the benefits for exchange students, they must face a series of obstacles in the host university and country. In their report, Bracht et al. (2006) show that Erasmus students face housing, administrative and academic problems, but students also feel lower self-esteem when they opt for subjects in a foreign language if they do not get adequate support from their teachers and peers. As De-Andrés (1999) explains, students' self-esteem depends on the positive or negative experiences that they get from their environment as well as on how they are perceived by their teachers or peers. In addition, the inability to integrate with the local students due to language and cultural barriers could make them feel homesick, helpless and doubtful of their intellectual and social competences. Cacioppo and Patrick (2008) explain that hassles in social adaptation could also cause loneliness. Hence, well-being is seen to be naturally correlated to the positive relations with and the cultural empathy that they receive from others (Ryff, 1989). Thus, several questions arise: (1) How can international students integrate and feel better in a Higher Education classroom? (2) What strategies can local students and teachers use to facilitate the Erasmus students' adaptation?

The complete integration of international students at the university must meet various requirements related to the social, academic and organizational systems of Higher Education (Himmel, 2002; Rienties, Beausaert, Grohnert, Niemantsverdriet, & Kommers, 2012). On one hand, the social integration demands include the development and frequency of positive interactions with other students and teachers, as well as the

participation in activities inside and outside the classroom (Himmel, 2002). On the other hand, psychological integration demands feelings of well-being and satisfaction (Searle & Ward, 1990). In addition, this process involves controlling negative emotions such as fear and anxiety in adverse situations and consequently remains highly dependent on each individual. Psychological and social integration can even improve if there is some type of support system (Cho & Yu, 2015; Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Yusoff, 2012), specific contact with faculty teachers and awareness of what they want to achieve during their stay abroad (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Rienties et al., 2012). However, the fact that some students give up can be due to a mixture of emotional and social factors, which means there is a need for support among local and international students and teachers (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994). In addition, it is necessary for international students to feel at the same time accepted, valued and included in the classroom, both by teachers and by their classmates (Mak, Bodycott, & Ramburuth, 2015).

Regarding strategies to improve integration, Kudo (2016) mentions, first, that it is necessary to look for strategies that favour the exchange within the classroom and, second, strategies that foster the exchange in extracurricular activities because "it has been found that the majority of interactions between foreign and national students occur in a non-academic setting" (p. 7). Moreover, Ward (2001) proposed forming groups of national and international students that would meet regularly outside the classroom, in addition to carrying out intercultural strategies of cooperation inside the classroom, in order to improve social support and intercultural friendships in the international context. However, Colmenero and Pantoja (2016) mention that the greatest influence on the majority of the students' university experience is what occurs inside the classroom, so teachers must be prepared to create inclusive environments when selecting texts, handling students who are not native speakers of the local language, fomenting their participation and facilitating learning. For both groups, teachers are the key to helping national students to learn more from this intercultural context.

Another proposal formulated by Kudo (2016) was to consider the existence of a common language between the students, in addition to the native language, in order to allow good interaction. Otherwise, language barriers could cause hassles in the integration process overall, as well as in creating intercultural friendships and fostering team spirit (Medven, Franco, Gao, & Yang, 2013). Although the effort of learning to speak a common language, such as English, should be mutual (local and international students), Li et al. (2010) mention that international students learn and live successfully in the host country when they integrate themselves within the group dynamics of the host country and when there is good communication with the local students. Therefore, promoting the learning of foreign languages by both parts is necessary in order to get to know local and international students, learn new cultures and get better integration to accomplish personal enrichment (Marginson & Sawir, 2011). Moreover, in the case of teachers, a certain foreign language level is increasingly required for the internationalization of the universities (Martín del Pozo, 2013) in order to facilitate better cultural exchange.

A further aspect to highlight is the need for good interaction between local and international students and between teachers and international students. On the one hand, according to the British Council (2014), those teachers who present little interaction with international students are less informed about their experiences and motivations and, at times, present a neutral feeling towards them. On the other hand, Colvin, Volet, and Fozdar (2014) revealed that the more flexible students, who were open and accepted change, interacted and mixed better with international students compared to students who did not show this interest.

International students' integration must be the responsibility of all students, and the teacher must help them to see the benefits of constructing a broader and more diverse international network that will enrich their personal and social experience at the university. Without the support of local students and teachers, the international students will face more sociocultural challenges (British Council, 2014) and emotional difficulties such as low morale, depression and loneliness. Kudo, Volet, and Whitsed (2017) found that "when intercultural interaction brought socio-emotional difficulties (e.g., anxiety and uncertainty), the international students tended to revert to their comfort zone (i.e., same culture communities)" (p.109).

Currently, there exist many studies which have addressed general exchange programs and international students' mobility, as well as their benefits (improved social ability, cultural sensitivity, heightened acceptance of other cultures, knowledge of other languages). However, few studies have analysed how to integrate these international students and which strategies to use so they are enriched with these benefits; fewer still have examined this issue within the context of Spanish universities, where a large number of Erasmus students face challenges and barriers of integration. The present study hopes to span this important gap, both theoretically and practically. By enhancing understanding of these strategies, teachers can enable Erasmus students' adaption within higher education, specifically within the classroom, and ultimately provide better support and integration for Erasmus students by building internationally inclusive environments.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to know what strategies teachers use to support and integrate international students and to understand which elements facilitate their integration in the classroom by: analysing the factors that facilitate the integration of international students in the classroom, and examining the strategies used by the teacher to achieve a greater integration of international students.

Method

Participants

Participants in this sample were a total of 13 Erasmus students and 2 teachers in the field of Educational Sciences. The Erasmus students varied in nationality (see Table 1 for sample description). In 2015, the students carried out their second-semester studies

(period of 5 months) at the University of Valencia (Spain). The ages ranged between 22 and 25 years, and 11 participants were women due to the actual university context in education field. The majority of the participants presented at the A1 level in Spanish. The sample selection was based on the non-probabilistic accidental method. Regarding teachers, both were women with wide experience working with international students (*M* age = 43 years).

Instrument

This study is based on a qualitative methodology, where semi-structured interviews were used to gather the information from both samples. In the interviews, the questions posed to international students were comprised in the following dimensions: expectations, adaptation, integration, interpersonal relationships and support perceived. In the teachers' interviews, topics were related to social support for Erasmus students, communication between teachers and Erasmus students, local students' support and support among the Erasmus students group itself.

Procedure

The Erasmus students' interviews were carried out in the international relations office of the Faculty. With help of the International Relations coordinator, the Erasmus students were contacted by email. If they agreed to participate, a day and time were chosen for the interview. The interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes, some in Spanish and others in English due to language difficulties. The teachers were selected based on the number of Erasmus students in their lectures, and the interviews were held in their own offices.

Table 1
Sample Description

Erasmus students (n = 13)	Gender	Nationality	Bachelor degree
2	Women	Portuguese	Pedagogy
4	Women	Italian	Pedagogy
3	Women (1) /Men (2)	German	Pedagogy
4	Women	Belgian	Pedagogy: 2 Social Education: 2

Results

The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim and then content analyses were performed. Results are described based on the main dimensions of the study.

Results of the Erasmus Students' Interviews

Relationships with and support from local students
International students can support each other and have good relationships between themselves, but at the same time they need the support of local students to adapt better both inside and outside of the classroom and university (Ramsay, Jones, & Barker, 2007). Results show that, for the majority of the exchange students, their friendship with local students was not able to go beyond the classroom walls:

> *"I do not meet Spanish students outside classroom, but I meet a girl from Belgium because I know her from Erasmus program" (German student, f, 22).*

However, we observed that Erasmus students have both international and Spanish relationships, although they usually have more contact and friendship with international students. This tendency to associate and bond with similar peers is very common among international students and promotes intercultural inclusiveness. Participants feel more accepted amongst each other as they are subject to similar experiences or situations; also, some of them have the same nationality and share a common language, which makes it easier to interact with each other:

> *"I think it is easier to make friends with a group of Erasmus students as we are in the same boat, far from our homes and countries, so we understand each other and can communicate better" (Portuguese student, f, 22).*

The lack of interaction between international and local students is one of the factors that contributes to the creation of mixed groups (international and local students) (Volet & Ang, 2012). The majority of the sample of Erasmus students indicated that they limit their social interactions to their study group or with other Erasmus or international students. Moreover, when these students have doubts or need to work collaboratively, they tend to contact other international students. One reason for this may be the ease of building trust and acceptance with these students:

> *"It is easier to talk to an Erasmus student who speaks Spanish than to a Spanish student. Among foreign students, it is easier to talk and build friendships" (Belgian f, 23).*

Therefore, when the teacher allows students to form their own study groups, it is more likely that local students will form their study groups with other local students. Similarly, Erasmus students display a tendency to study with other international students, regardless of nationality (De-Juan-Vigaray et al., 2014). Thus, international students remain in their "comfort zone" and isolate themselves from local students:

> *"…at the beginning of the semester we had to make a group and everyone already knew each other, so we looked at each other [Erasmus students] and decided to do it together because the teacher gave us more freedom" (Italian student, f, 23).*

However, data reveals that teachers usually adopted a strategy to form blended work groups with both international and local students.

A lack of empathy creates an additional hassle in the creation of positive intercultural relationships. International students often feel isolated being away from their loved ones. In such situations, local students can promote feelings of inclusiveness. However, support and friendship obtained from local students differed greatly depending on cultural empathy. According to the interviewees, some local students do not understand what it is like to be an Erasmus student,

> *"…they can't imagine the double effort we have to do for adapt to the university: group work, reading texts in Spanish, and we need more time than they do, and today the girl said you can read twenty pages of exercises for today and I said no, it's not possible, I can't sleep, and I have class, I have the practicum, it's impossible" (Belgian student, f, 22).*

and sometimes they express certain prejudices toward them:

> *"…she said to another guy something like Erasmus never understand anything, but I'm not sure what she said because she was talking really fast, but I know it is something very negative; I talked to other Erasmus and they said yes, she doesn't like them" (German, f, 22).*

The interviewees also felt that local students are unaware of the reasons why Erasmus students are less available to do class work and find it more difficult to understand the activity; they assume that these aspects indicate a lack of interest. These socioemotional challenges and prejudices can be reduced by increasing the contact among members of different cultures; as an example, Ward (2001) explained that intercultural study groups discourage stereotypes and promote interaction with other cultures. This is commonly referred to as the contact hypothesis theory (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), where contact and interaction with a given culture reduces prejudice (Schiappa, Gregg, & Hewes, 2005). In fact, Allport (1954) (as cited in Schiappa et al., 2005) posits that prejudice and stereotypes result from incomplete or mistaken information.

However, not all students behave in the same way. Instead, according to some of the other interviewees, they feel accepted because some local students support and help them:

> *"…helping me a lot, for example, in situations where we have to do some exercises, my classmates do a lot, trying to explain meanings to me, and so I had a lot of help from my classmates" (German student, m, 25).*

Intercultural friendships are often also hindered by linguistic problems. In particular, difficulty in understanding local language is a factor that affects international students' low social participation in activities (Tatar, 2005). Hashimoto and Kudo (2010) revealed that students with lower proficiency in a language (in this case Spanish) tend to feel insecure or inferior towards students who can express themselves freely. The results obtained from the interviews with Erasmus students reveal that linguistic difficulty has been one of the most significant barriers for their integration with other students. It also creates barriers when attempting to inform their teachers about problems. Some of the participants have expressed:

> *"In the beginning it's hard, it was hard for me I wasn't understanding what others students were saying […] It was hard to me to ask the teacher because of the language problem, it was like going to him and ask him something in Spanish and he wasn't understanding the problem, and I wrote an email and he was answering me something different and I was like ok he is not getting it" (German student, m, 25).*

> *"It's really difficult for me to talk to others because I don't talk Spanish really well, so it made it little difficult to speak to teachers and also to others students and to fully integrate in the whole group" (Belgian student, f, 20).*

Also, international students feel disappointed with themselves when they do not reach their language level expectations, as they understand that learning the local language is a key factor to communicate and create deep relationships:

> *"I thought it would be easier at the end of the semester to talk to the other students and mix up with them, but because I didn't take Spanish classes, it's still really hard for me but that's my own responsibility, so yes that was the only thing I was little disappointed with myself" (German student, m, 25).*

Beyond the language barrier, there is a need to interculturally communicate and improve relationships between local and international students in Higher Education (Kudo, 2016).

Support from teachers

Erasmus students in the host country must understand a different cultural context and adapt to new methodologies while taking subjects in a different language and with a higher level of demand (Bracht et al., 2006) in terms of time and effort. All of these barriers could disappear with adequate support from the teachers, though. Thus, results show the need to reduce the workload in the initial days of class in order to ease the pressure on international students, ultimately aiding in adaptation. As Colmenero and Pantoja (2016) point out, "it is important to assess the work in order to offer the students guidelines for improvement" (p. 501).

In addition, international students bring an international perspective into the classroom that encourages teachers to propose new strategies and attitudes that foment openness, flexibility, tolerance and the acceptance of individual and group differences (Fernández, 2011). The results of the study reveal the importance of the teacher's role in students' integration. Closeness, interest, concern and empathy from the teacher are factors that make students feel more or less integrated:

> *"…this teacher is a person who knows the difficulties a student can have*
> *in an experience like Erasmus […] she asks me how I've been or if she*
> *sometimes hasn't seen me in class, she asks if I've been okay, and she*
> *doesn't say you have to come to all the classes" (Italian student, f, 22).*

However, when the teachers do not show enough attention or support for exchange students, the students' experiences may not be as positive as expected. The results also reveal that in situations where Erasmus students do not receive sufficient support from the teacher, the support offered by local students may help them to feel more included in classroom:

> *"…I have a classmate who sends me her summary of all the classes she*
> *can, which is a great help to me" (German student, m, 25).*

Sometimes teachers are not very flexible with Erasmus students. In those cases, exchange students have to look for less costly emotional alternatives:

> *"…no, I only talked to the teacher at the end of the class" (Portuguese*
> *student, f, 22).*

Tatar (2005) points out that international students do not participate during the class until they are directly asked by the teacher. There are even various Erasmus students who directly ask their classmates instead of asking the teacher because they feel closer to their peers:

> *"…because I ask my classmates the meaning of what my teacher says,*
> *no conversation with the teacher, only whether it is possible to write in*

English" (German student, m, 25).

Results of Teacher interviews

Teachers' support for Erasmus students
Teachers play an important role in integrating the international students in classroom and in campus life. Their support and interest in providing an international perspective in the course helps to create an inclusive environment (Valdez, 2016).

Results of the interviews with teachers show that they provide support through: fostering group dynamics, integrating exchange students in different work groups, giving support during the first month, giving additional time to complete tasks and carrying out positive discrimination, among other ways.

As an additional strategy, teachers ensure that exchange students feel included and accepted:

> *"I make sure I ask them how it is done in their country, so that they know*
> *that they matter to us and we are interested to know them better"*
> *(Spanish teacher, f, 43).*

Moreover, teachers also make sure that international students have meetings in the initial days to evaluate emotional and psychological adaptation to the culture and university context. This strategy ensures that international students feel prepared to be part of the group in the classroom and that their adaptation process flows in an adequate environment.

Regarding communication with exchange students, teachers prefer to communicate in Spanish, and they only translate into English when necessary. Spanish teachers feel that this strategy will ensure that international students are forced to communicate in Spanish, taking them out of their "comfort zone."

The teachers' attitudes toward Erasmus students are, first, to take into account the Erasmus students they have in the classroom and, second, to recognize that they are an essential and worthy element:

> *"…just as the Erasmus students gain when they go to another country to*
> *know another university, another culture, the Spanish students also gain*
> *by knowing Erasmus student's perspective" (Spanish teacher, f, 43).*

Local students' support and relationship with Erasmus students
The teachers' perspective of local students' relationships with and support toward Erasmus students reveals that local students are usually empathetic toward the Erasmus students. They also recognize that there are two types of students: some who are more competitive and others who are more supportive. The more competitive ones avoid working with international students because:

> *"…they respond to an educational system that is competitive by nature,*
> *and no matter how much you want to work in class using cooperative*
> *techniques, integration of support strategies, the system continues to be*
> *competitive. It depends on each person and the values that guide the*
> *way of being and understanding what education is, what the world is,*
> *etc. of each person" (Spanish teacher, f, 43).*

Erasmus students' relationships

Teachers feel that the relationships outside of the university between Erasmus students are usually more common than with local students, and there is little relationship with local students.

The following table (Table 2) provides an overview of the teachers' perspectives in the dimensions mentioned above: teachers' support, communication and attitude towards Erasmus students, and support and relationships between local and Erasmus students.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to find out what factors facilitate international students' adaptation and which strategies teachers use to achieve this integration. Regarding the first objective, "factors that facilitate the integration of international students in the classroom," there are some elements that seem to play an important role when it comes to Erasmus students' integration, such as support offered by teachers and other students, relationships between international and local students, or the obstacles that interfere in the interpersonal relations (language barrier).

First, the support offered by the teacher and the other students facilitates the integration at both the personal and sociocultural levels (British Council, 2014). The results show quite diverse experiences, where at times the local students are not aware of the difficulties the Erasmus students have, and at other times they offer even more support than teachers. The empathy, flexibility and open-mindedness of the local students also support this integration (Colvin et al., 2014), just as the closeness, interest and concern of the teacher is important, along with the foreign student's attitude about integration. Various studies (Harumi, 2010; Jaworski, 2005; Ping, 2010; Tatar, 2005) have examined the reasons that international students remain silent and do not integrate in the classroom. Some reasons include: lack of comprehension, fear of making mistakes, belief in the traditional learning style and the specific and different dynamics of the class. For these reasons, results show that international students ask questions mainly at the end of class and try to avoid participating in the class when they feel insecure or are not confident.

Thus, the ideal situation for adaptation would be one mutual collaboration amongst teachers, local students and international students so that the exchange experience can lead to personal success and development in both directions.

Table 2

Summary of Teachers' Strategies, Attitudes and Local Students' Relationship with Exchange Students in the Classroom

Dimensions				
1.Support	2. Communication with Erasmus students	3. Attitude towards Erasmus students	4. Support and relationship of local students towards Erasmus students	5. Erasmus relationships among themselves
Group dynamics introduction.	Professors do not consider speaking with Erasmus students in other language.	Aware of Erasmus students in class.	Local students are empathetic with Erasmus students.	Erasmus students relate more often with other Erasmus than with local students outside class.
Integration in different groups.	Force to communicate in Spanish taking them out of their "comfort zone".	Thinking Erasmus students are a key element: Those students offer an international perspective to the course content.	Two students' perspectives: competition vs solidarity.	In class they try to gather in groups also with local students.

Next, the relationship between international and local students inside the classroom has been more or less positive depending on personal experiences. Concretely, results show that group work improves interpersonal relationships, as long as the students have a supportive and empathic mentality and are willing to help exchange students. According to Ward (2001), group work improves performance and friendship even though it has the disadvantage of impeding the relationship with the rest of the class.

According to the results, language is also a key factor in having more contact and relationships with local students both outside and inside the university (Medven et al., 2013). Additionally, Kudo (2016) indicates the importance of having a common reference language in addition to the native language. On the one hand, in the case of the international students, it has been observed that some universities, in order to eliminate

these barriers and improve the performance of the international students, provide them with linguistic support (Mak et al., 2015). On the other hand, in the case of the local students, it is easy to imagine that it would be difficult to foment foreign language learning (for example, English) because local students do not really see the need for it. However, it is important for the students to get to know each other better, integrate and learn about new cultures and languages as a form of personal enrichment (Marginson & Sawir, 2011). Also, in another exploratory study (Vazirani et al., 2016), local students understood that international students felt satisfied and perceived university to be a more positive, enriching and beneficial experience when international students engaged in social activities with local students. Local students also considered this to be beneficial for themselves. This social interaction, according local students, contributed to the overall development and well-being of the international students.

Results reveal that, in spite of the existence of a relationship between national and international students outside of class, this was only minimally possible because strong friendship ties were not established. According to Kudo (2016), "the majority of the interaction between students and nationals occurs in a non-academic setting" (p. 7). Thus, Ward (2001) proposed an integration strategy: form groups of international and local students outside the class environment.

The results also show that the relationships among Erasmus students have been positive for various reasons: common language, mutual understanding and the same international situation and difficulties. Hence, on various occasions exchange students tend to group together and create a bubble, and this phenomenon can be observed in many universities (Mak et al., 2015). These authors also indicate that many international students present neutral social support from local students and that this support is instead given by other non-local students. Moreover, Yussof (2012) found that international students with international partners gave better support than other contacts due to having similar experiences.

Finally, it is important to understand that, for full adaptation, it is necessary to integrate exchange students in two levels. According to Searle and Ward (1990), the levels are: a psychological level, which involves feelings of well-being and satisfaction; and a social level, which involves the ability to interact with the new culture (in this case, with local and international students, and teachers). Both levels mentioned can improve if there is some type of support system (Cho & Yu, 2015; Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Yusoff, 2012), which can be seen in the results from the international students.

Regarding the second objective, "strategies used by the teacher to achieve a greater integration of international students," results reveal that teachers understand "integration" of Erasmus students in different ways and, therefore, use different types of strategies to handle internationalization in the classroom. However, integrating the Erasmus students in groups of national students was one of the most widely utilized strategies by the teacher. De-Juan-Vigaray et al. (2014) show that if this distribution did not exist the tendency would be to create isolated groups of Erasmus students and create an exchange students' bubble.

Also, we find some discrepancies between the viewpoints of international students and teachers. On one hand, teachers believe that they provide enough support through various strategies to integrate the international students and ensure that they matter in the classroom; however, some international students believe that the classroom environment and work groups prevent them from fully integrating. Additionally, while teachers believe that international students interact with each other primarily outside of the classroom, the students assert that they typically communicate both inside and outside the university. Though teachers generally believe that local students demonstrate empathy, except in some ultracompetitive cases, international students posit that they have encountered some local students who do not understand Erasmus students' situation and therefore demonstrate less empathy with their plight.

Moreover, we must mention that the study was focused more on the factors and strategies that would allow Erasmus students to adapt more fluidly to a foreign environment than on the psychological processes (e.g., well-being, loneliness, self-esteem), which remains one of the limitations of the present research.

Finally, results show that teachers give international students support depending on personal characteristics and their concept of internationalization at the university. There are teachers who are very interested in and concerned about the Erasmus students, and there are others who somewhat ignore them.

In conclusion, results show that a lack of support and relationships, as well as communication problems with teachers and students, could lead to negative experiences and feelings during an international exchange experience. However, we need to highlight that the positive international experiences in our study were connected to specific inclusive strategies in classroom and the perceived support by local students, teachers and other Erasmus students.

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